

## THEN THE WHOLE MOUNTAIN LEAPT DOWN...

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### *Introduction*

The title words describe a phenomenon in geomorphology, which in Icelandic has literally been called a mountain leap or a rock leap (berghlaup), in German Bergsturz and in English rockslide (Olafur Jonsson 1976). When this happens, there is a drastic and permanent change in the landscape. Old and familiar features vanish and new ones come into being.

In spite of ongoing automation in libraries and information centres for around three decades the library landscape has, until now, remained unchanged. Traditional work in libraries: collection development, technical services, patron services and cooperation, are to a large extent the same. Orders have been placed with agents or publishers. Something substantial has been received, be it books, journals or disks of some sort, something we can hold in our hands, place in our libraries and in most cases use in the traditional way.

Now there are, however, indications that dramatic changes in the dissemination of information are about to take place, changing not only the landscape of library and information science, but also where the power to control knowledge, in a knowledge based society, resides, threatening thereby democracy\* itself.

In this paper an outline is given of traditional collection development, developments in publishing and its influence on access to knowledge and on where the power in society resides, new features appearing in the library and information world and a historical perspective of the importance and control of information.

*\*In the context of this paper democracy is used in a twofold sense, that of : a government by the people; that form of government in which the sovereign power resides in the people as a whole, and is exercised either directly by them or by officers elected by them and in the sense of a political, social or economic equality : the absence or disavowal of hereditary or arbitrary class distinction or privileges (Webster's Third New International Dictionary 1963; The Oxford English Dictionary 1989).*

### *Collection development*

It used to be the role of librarians to build gigantic collections of written information where recorded knowledge of mankind was preserved, for the use of the present and posterity. In large research libraries the immediate usefulness of an item was of no consequence. Of importance was the accumulation of all the material needed to build a complete collection on a given subject, regardless of whether individual items would be used close to the time of acquisition or a century later. These collections were maintained for the use of scholars when needed. Now collection development is less and less about building collections and more and more about acquiring access to material, which in some cases has uncertain durability.

### *Developments in publishing and access*

Modern publishing is considered to have begun in the eighteenth century. At that time and also in the nineteenth century many of the publishing houses still active today were founded. The common people of those times read to acquire knowledge. It was the time when circulating libraries were established and the great encyclopaedias, such as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* were founded. Both can be thought of as "universities" of the poor people or those unable to attend school and get a formal education. They had tremendous educational influence. At the beginning of the twentieth century some very large and influential publishing houses were established (Dessauer 1989). Even so the publishing industry, in the United States for example, was a minor one, economically, until the Second World War (Dessauer 1989).

Since the middle of this century tremendous changes have taken place in the publishing industry: in ownership, publishing policies and in the media of publications. Previously publishing houses were often owned by families, **interested** in publishing and distributing certain kinds of information, knowledge or literature.

When publishing scientific and scholarly material became more profitable around the middle of the twentieth century, many of the old publishing houses which had been at the forefront of publishing over a century were bought by large conglomerates with the effect that towards the close of the eighties most of them had vanished or lost their autonomy, (Dessauer 1989) although publications are still issued in their names.

Since then, more and more publishing houses have been bought by gigantic conglomerates, some of which own many publishing houses and are all set to buy more should the opportunity arise. Even though associations and institutions issue a sizeable amount of the publishing, a large amount of scientific and scholarly publishing is issued "for-profit-only". In the landscape of dissemination of scientific information **this is a rockslide.**

Changes in ownership brought national and international supercorporations into publishing, which brought economic pressures to get maximum profit, resulting in changes in publishing and distribution policies. Emphasis was put on publishing and distribution of so called "big books" which would sell a large amount of copies at the cost of titles less likely to make big sales (Dessauer 1989). The "small" titles do not get the same distribution and advertisements as the ones likely to sell well in the first place. Authors have been stressed about this and have in some cases themselves promoted the sales of their books (Dessauer 1989).

This development means that on the whole fewer thoughts and ideas are being promoted. As a consequence our intellectual life will keep growing poorer, over time, instead of growing richer as one would expect during the information age in the knowledge-based societies. In democratic societies, everyone, not only the authors, should be concerned about dissatisfactory distribution of published knowledge and cultural material.

The publishers have decided what gets published and how it is distributed and promoted. With the advent of computerized publishing, publishers and distributors also decide who gets to buy or have access to what, and in addition they pose new restrictions on how the publications can be used after they have sold them. They even decide who of the traditional library users get to use what they sell to the libraries. The distributors define the user groups of the libraries, not the libraries themselves or those running the libraries. In the library landscape **this is a rockslide.**

Except for old print on paper material, interlibrary loans will soon be a thing of the past and so will consortia and cooperative collection development. These were devised to maximize the choices of library patrons by giving them access to the holdings of more than one library. In the future more and more of the material will be available directly through the Internet in the publishers' or distributors' databases. From there information will be sold directly to users in small units. Until now the unit of sale has been no smaller than a journal article, for example. In the future it is likely that the unit of sale will be a certain part of a journal article, for example, a graph, a table, some other illustration or part of text, identified by the DOI numbers (DOI 1998). In the **library landscape** and in the landscape of dissemination of scientific information, **this is a rockslide.**

Because there are limitations to the geographic distribution of those having access to subscriptions of computerized material, a university or a company in more than one location has to buy as many subscriptions to access as there are locations. The smallest unit of access is one concurrent user meaning, in many cases, around 50 people. In many cases this means that individual users and whole countries, like Iceland, will have to do without access to high priced electronic material, when there are not enough users to justify buying access for even one concurrent user. **In the library landscape this is a rockslide.**

Individuals can freely lend each other publications in the paper format, but it is, in some cases, illegal to lend another person one's password to a publication in the computerized format. Staff working at outposts or in remote departments does not have access unless it is paid especially. Publications in the paper format, however, can circulate freely within the organization. Printed publications in older editions can be passed to the outposts, whereas disks with electronically published material have, in many cases, had to be returned to the publisher upon the issue of the next edition.

Due to these restrictions there is in some cases, contrary to expectations, less access to the information when it is in computerized format than there was to information in the print on paper format. In a knowledge-based society this means that an end is put to economic and social equality, when only those with money can buy access to the basis of success: knowledge itself.

### *Residence of power*

Even though the restrictions of use are posed in the name of economic viability, it is clear that publishers and distributors do by this take power to limit the distribution of published knowledge, power which they should not hold in democratic societies, especially as such power can be used for other purposes than assuring economic viability.

Given the fact that the discovery of the knowledge distributed with these conditions has, in many cases at least partly, been financed by the public, e.g., results of research carried out at publicly funded universities and research projects financed by public funds, limitations of use and absorbent costs cannot be tolerated. Publishers and distributors in this way limit reasonable use and reasonable distribution of published information and knowledge.

Research, at least in some subject fields is, to an ever larger extent, financed and even carried out, by private companies, for example pharmaceutical companies. This not only means that they have the power to sell publications of the results dearly, it also means that they have the power to suppress findings which will harm them financially.

**Domination of private companies over the access to published material and newly discovered knowledge equals a shift in power from democratically elected delegates and the citizens to the owners of the publishing and distributing companies and the sponsors of research, which in some cases may be the same party. If these developments are not stopped the results could become catastrophic.**

### *New features in the library and information landscape*

In the landscape of library and information science some examples of rockslides, destroying familiar old scenarios, have been demonstrated. There should also be some new features in the library and information landscape. And there are. Subscription

services, database hosts, publishers of computerized material and document supply centres are combining access to their services in such a way that after locating desired items by searching bibliographic databases the user can, at the touch of a key, automatically get fulltext access to the desired items, provided that he or his library subscribes to the access or order it online from a publisher or document supply centre (SilverPlatter Information SilverLinker 1998; SilverPlatter Information Press release Swets Subscription 1998; SilverPlatter Information Springer Verlag 1998; SilverPlatter Information Press release SilverLinker TM 1998; SilverPlatter Information. British Library Document Supply 1998).

Less than a year ago the user would have had to first do a search in a bibliographic database, then find the desired item in the library, and order it from the publisher or on interlibrary loan.

### *Importance of knowledge and information : a historical perspective*

At this point it is healthy to look back at some examples from the past. The importance of knowledge and information is not a new discovery. Nor is it a new discovery that to have **absolute power**, a ruler has to be able to **control** access to **information absolutely** and to obliterate information as needed for his rule. The very existence of organized societies depends on information. Evidence remains of collections of information, serving the same purpose as modern day records centres, archives and libraries, which have been discovered and dated since before the existence of writing systems (Peterson 1988). From the very beginning of organized societies recording, organization, conservation and the control of right of access to information has been of importance to rulers.

The founder of the Chinese empire, Qin, who ruled around 220 BC, on the recommendation of his Grand Councillor Li Si, had books burned in order to *"make the people ignorant"* and to prevent criticism of his rule based on knowledge of the past. The only books to be spared were those on medicine, agriculture and divination. This measure also served the purpose of making knowledge an imperial monopoly. Those who wished to study were to take the officials as their teachers. When this measure did not suffice to keep criticism of his rule at bay, Qin conducted a purge of scholars (Cottrell 1995). His empire lasted over two thousand years.

The reverse is also true, namely, that giving the public political power, means giving them access to knowledge and information and it means organizing the access in such a way that the required knowledge and information **can** be found with ease and speed and used when required.

In Western societies ownership of and access to information has changed with the passing of time. Most of the time access to information and knowledge was limited to members of the ruling classes.

In the wake of the French Revolution, 1789-1799, came a turning point in public access to primary information and published knowledge. During the French revolution records were considered to be a basis for the establishment of a new society, the same way as they had been the basis for maintaining the old one. Records of the old society were maintained probably for cultural and historical reasons. Records of the new society were preserved for the protection of public rights. The first national archives to be established was the French Archives Nationales, established in 1790 in Paris.

In the French Revolution access to records was recognized as being important to society. To secure that access:

- an independent, national, archival administration was established;
- responsibility of the state for the care of the valuable documents of the past was recognized
- the principle of public access to archives was proclaimed. The decree of the 25th of June 1794, has been considered an archival bill of rights, for it proclaimed the right of the public to access public records (Schellenberg 1956).

The public also gained access to published knowledge. A lot of books and whole libraries such as libraries of the émigrés and libraries of the church were confiscated. Thus some 8,000,000 books became national property. The most valuable of them went to the French Royal Library, which was duly renamed La Bibliothèque Nationale. The French National Library was open to the public for four hours every day before the end of the eighteenth century. Interest of the authorities in the library remained and it continued to grow through legal deposits, gifts, legacies, and government appropriations (Gates 1968; Thompson 1977).

As we all know, accumulation of library material is of no use without proper organization and cataloging. In the heat of the aftermath of the revolution, time was taken to compile the first national code of cataloging rules. In 1791 custodians of the books received these rules on how to catalog them. They were made for a card catalog, which was a rare catalog form at the time.

A copy of the catalog of books in each district was kept there and a copy sent to Paris where it formed a part of the national union catalog. Around three million publications were cataloged. The citizens could see in the union catalog in Paris what was available in each district and what was available in Paris itself (Norris 1939).

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries national libraries were established in many European countries, amongst them the National Library of Iceland in 1818 (Jon Jakobsson 1920; Gates 1968).

After the Russian revolution, between 1918 and 1923, similar developments took place. Books and whole libraries were confiscated and transferred to the Lenin State Library, in which Lenin himself took personal interest (Thompson (1977).

### ***Final words***

Turning back to the present, it should worry us:

- That a sizable amount of vital information never becomes published knowledge, because it is owned by parties having a vested interest in suppressing it.
- That more and more restrictions are being put on public access to published knowledge. In some instances, it is doubtful that we can talk about publications in the true meaning of that word (to publish is derived from the Latin word *publicare*, meaning: to make public) as some of the computerized documents are issued with limited distribution and restricted use.
- That in our knowledge based information society, **the power to control:**
  - \* which pieces of information become published knowledge**
  - \* how publications are advertised and promoted, actually fewer and fewer thoughts and ideas are being promoted**
  - \* which parties get to buy access to the publications**
  - \* who gets to use the access once it is bought**resides with **private parties** with vested interest in making money.

Should their interests turn to something else, like for example gaining political power, the really big rockslides will fall, shaking the basis of democratic societies and in the end destroying them.

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